

# Puerto Rico Builds Back Stronger Through Local Mitigation Plans

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*Over \$12 million has been obligated for hazard mitigation planning projects on the island*

**GUAYNABO, Puerto Rico** – FEMA, in coordination with the Puerto Rico Central Office for Recovery, Reconstruction and Resilience, or COR3, has approved mitigation plans for 17 municipalities across the island in the last year. Currently, a total of 30 municipalities have approved plans in place, while the remaining 48 municipalities are actively engaged in updating their plans to help minimize the impacts associated with future disasters.

As an important first step towards qualifying for federal project funding through the Agency's Hazard Mitigation Planning Grant Program, or HMGP, a local hazard mitigation plan must be in place. These plans incorporate input from communities to identify risks as part of the island's recovery efforts after Hurricane María. Mitigation plans include proposed projects that may be developed once funding becomes available.

"We are committed to ensuring Puerto Rico's recovery is effective, and mitigation plays an important role in achieving the shared goal of a resilient island. Emergency management is a cycle and mitigation actions taken by municipalities today lessen the impact of future disasters in our communities," said Federal Disaster Recovery Coordinator for Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands, Alex Amparo.

Among the municipalities with approved plans is Toa Baja, whose mitigation strategy identifies as a funding priority the need for flood control measures at the La Plata River, which flows into a lake of the same name that provides water to roughly 131,000 residents across several municipalities.

"This is our most important mitigation project, which will not only have a great impact on Toa Baja but is also a regional project that will help with flood control in



several municipalities. It is fundamental for the future of Toa Baja, since it will achieve a reduction of more than 80 percent of the problems associated with flooding,” said the mayor Toa Baja, Bernardo “Betito” Márquez García.

In the neighboring municipality of Bayamón, community surveys led to a plan that prioritizes possible mitigation measures such as a permanent shelter at the Padre Rulfo Fernández School in Santa Juanita and the elevation of a bridge in the Sector Chorreras in Barrio Guaraguao, which provides access to about 10,000 residents.

“When assessing risks, past events and the existing condition of communities are taken into consideration through different types of analyses and citizen participation strategies, such as community surveys. Working with FEMA and COR3 staff on these projects has been a successful and collaborative experience,” said the mayor of Bayamón, Ramon Luis Rivera Jr.

Towards the center of the island, the municipality of Comerío held a series of public participation meetings to determine prospective solutions for their unique challenges. These include storm water overflow systems for nine state roads, including main arteries used by the municipality’s nearly 21,000 residents such as PR-156, PR-167, PR-782 and PR-781. In addition, their mitigation plan proposes installing hurricane shutters at the City Hall, Municipal Operations Center, and the Public Works and Services Pavilion.

“We had about eight community meetings with different sectors including nine neighborhoods and vulnerable areas of Comerío. Thanks to the communication and collaboration with FEMA, we were one of the first 20 municipalities to have its mitigation plan approved and these projects are being used as models for other municipalities,” said the Director of Emergency Management in Comerío, Jaime García Mercado.

For his part, the Executive Director for COR3, Ottmar Chavez, highlighted the significance of mitigation plans as part of the island’s recovery process. “As a result of the disasters we have experienced, various strategies have been outlined to work together with the federal government for the recovery of the island. Certainly, the municipalities have been key in this important effort. We are committed to the effective implementation of mitigation plans to lessen the effects of future emergencies and ensure the quality of life of all Puerto Ricans,” said



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Chávez.

By identifying local threats, each municipality can determine how best to locally reduce or mitigate hazards. Studies have shown that every \$1 spent on mitigation activities saves an average of \$6 in future disaster costs. Federal funding is available to assist all 78 municipalities in updating or developing mitigation plans as part of the island's recovery efforts after Hurricane María.

For more information on Puerto Rico's recovery from Hurricane María, visit [fema.gov/disaster/4339](https://fema.gov/disaster/4339) and [recovery.pr](https://recovery.pr). Follow us on social media at [Facebook.com/FEMAPuertoRico](https://Facebook.com/FEMAPuertoRico), [Facebook.com/COR3pr](https://Facebook.com/COR3pr) and on [@COR3pr](https://Twitter.com/COR3pr).

